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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the use of drama activities in Second Language instruction looks at the rationale for using such techniques in the language classroom, describes a progression of drama activities used for an intensive course in intermediate English as a Second Language, and examines other considerations in the use of drama in language teaching. Discussion of the rationale focuses on the following issues: (1) the power of theater, both in human society and for individuals; (2) the opportunity for ego expression; (3) drama as an affective filter; (4) the value of play; (5) process and purpose in a drama project; (6) drama as an opportunity for cultural expression and adaptation; (7) making use of class or group dynamics; and (8) psychology. Nineteen specific, progressive drama activities are described, ranging from simple observation of the environment to the production of a movie. The description of each activity includes the teacher's objectives, the proposed task and procedures, and a process and outcome analysis based on the author's experience with the activity in class. The final chapter summarizes the four primary objectives for the course and the outcomes of each. (MSE)

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THEATRE TECHNIQUES FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING:

ASSUMPTIONS AND A SUGGESTED PROGRESSION OF ACTIVITIES

Submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the

Master of Arts in Teaching degree

at the School for International Training,

Brattleboro, Vermont.

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By

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June 1989

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the use of theatre/drama techniques for language teaching. It describes the background and progression of drama activities that I used to teach a class of intermediate EFL students in an intensive four-week language program.

The first section addresses my rationale for using such techniques in the language classroom and why I think they are so effective as a language teaching tool.

The second section describes the progression of drama activities that I used for this course, moving from simple, low-risk drama activities to a full theatre production - written, directed and acted in by my students.

Finally, I provide a brief overview of other considerations for the use of drama in language teaching.

ERIC Descriptors

Second Language Instruction	CIJE: 2067	RIE: 2109	GC: 450
English (Second Language)	CIJE: 3334	RIE: 4891	GC: 440
Teaching Methods	CIJE: 27458	RIE: 20216	GC: 310
Dramatic Play	CIJE: 197	RIE: 177	GC: 420
Creative Dramatics	CIJE: 272	RIE: 234	GC: 420

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"An actor can alter the circumstances of life portrayed on the stage, he can find it in himself to believe in a new super-objective. He can give himself up to the main line of action which goes, through a play, he can combine his recalled emotions in one way or another, he can put them in this or that sequence, he can develop habits in his role which are not native to him, and methods of physical portrayal as well, and he can change his mannerisms, his exterior. All this will make the actor seem different in every role to the audience. But he will always remain himself too."

-Constantin Stanislavski-
(Stanislavski 1961)

The English language student is an actor, in the same way that we are all actors. Human beings take on roles and perfect their various personas to correspond to the situation at hand. We develop complex methods of adjusting our behavior and speech styles to meet the needs of each different encounter of our lives.

In the same way, students of English as a foreign language must add to the repertoire of personas at their disposal to include an English speaking, culturally appropriate persona. They must look within themselves to find this English speaking character and then be given a chance to allow it to develop and grow.

In my opinion, this leads naturally to the idea of using drama and theatre as a way of teaching English as a foreign language and begins to answer the question of why I have chosen to use drama to teach languages in general and English specifically. Using drama as a tool in teaching languages is not

a new idea. Those who have spent any time studying alternative techniques for language teaching have run across the works of those who have put teaching languages through drama into the mainstream. I am thinking specifically of Richard Via, University of Hawaii at Manoa; Charlyn Wessels, Stevenson College, Edinburgh; and Alan Maley and Alan Duff, both of Cambridge University. I have drawn very heavily on their work as I have explored the possibilities and ramifications of using drama as a language teaching tool. I have also relied on the work of several author/artists whose focus is not language teaching but rather the teaching of acting/drama as an art form. Included in this group are Viola Spolin, Paul Kuritz and Constantin Stanislavsky. I found that these two types of focus on the same activity of drama were neither dissimilar nor mutually exclusive. Rather, I feel that both schools are speaking to the same ideal; that is, encouraging and allowing their students to tap into a source of expression and communication that all humans possess but which is often hidden or denied. I feel very strongly that drama provides the key to unlocking the potential for human expression and communication in a broader societal context and thus can also serve that purpose in the language learning context, be it the language classroom or elsewhere in a language learner's experience.

In this paper I am going to discuss my experience using drama to teach English to a group of 7 intermediate students of English at Proctor Academy's Summer School of English in Andover, New Hampshire. I will explain my beliefs about drama as a language teaching tool based upon a number of key focal points. I will then explain the drama curriculum process which I used and relate the outcomes that occurred in my experience at Proctor. It is my intention that this paper will serve as a resource to other instructors interested in the why and how-to's of drama in the language classroom.

In George Kelly's play "The Flattering Word", one of the characters says,

> "Tell any man, woman or child that he should be on stage, - and you'll find him quite as susceptible as a cat to catnip.... Because every human being has, at some time or other in his life, experienced the desire to be on the stage. Of course, he may not admit it; but he has, just the same; and if he hasn't, all you have got to do is tell him that he should be on the stage and he WILL experience it. I tell you ..., that is the most universal susceptibility. And very natually so; the most fundamental instinct of human life is to express oneself; and the stage is perhaps the most complete form of self expression; so that when a person is stagestruck he is simply struck with the desire to express himself more completely".

I think that this expresses precisely why drama works so well in language learning. Learning to speak a language other than your mother tongue is all about "the desire to express yourself more completely". This is ultimately what our job as language teachers is - to provide our students with an

environment where they can acquire the necessary skills and attitudes to be able to do this to their satisfaction in the target language. The drama/EFL classroom provides such an environment. In this setting the students are given the opportunity to explore, develop and practice who they are in the new language while they learn how to express this to others.

As I see it, there are 8 major focus points to consider when looking at the use of drama in language teaching. These focus points provide the different perspectives from which the technique of drama as a teaching tool has evolved. They are:

- the power of theater
- psychology
- ego expression
- affective filter
- the value of play
- process and purpose
- cultural expression/adaptation
- class/group dynamics.

I will discuss each of these points, demonstrating how and why I feel that they support the use of theatre techniques in the language classroom.

THE POWER OF THEATRE

Theatre is a microcosm of life; it is the place in a society where all the illusions, beauty and tragedies of life are exposed. In many ways theatre

plays a remarkable role in a society. Theatre exposes human kind's foibles and their strengths, at the same time. Theatre is one place where scathing social commentary has been allowed, even nurtured, when is has not been allowed in other sectors of the society. I consider theatre to be more "real" than reality in a certain respect, in that because in day to day life, there are many things that we are not allowed by cultural/social mores to express or acknowledge, we are therefore often acting in a way other than we are or feel. This serves to blind us to the reality of the human condition. In theatre this restriction does not apply. Theatre is generally considered to be illusory and for this reason, anything and everything is acceptable. People can say and do things that are not allowed in daily experience. The entire gamut of human emotions, craziness, passion, absolute stoic sanity - all of these are not only acceptable, but expected in theatre. In theatre, one is allowed to expose all of those hidden feelings, ideas and truths which we espouse without risking being ostracized by our very society. This might be considered convenient, but I also feel that it is fundamentally very healthy both for the individual actor and also for the society as a whole.

If theatre has this power, then I believe that the individual role play has a similar power. An individual does not necessarily have to be immersed in the experience of performing in a "piece" in order to experience the

liberating effects of being able to step our of him/herself and become who they are at their core or who they would LIKE to be. An individual is given the opportunity to become MORE than they think they are. This exciting premise is my primary reason for focusing on drama in language teaching and describes an important part of what I wish to accomplish. If there are no limits placed on who they will become, then students can feel that they are free to be anybody they wish to be - and they will emerge as a combination of their new and old personas within the new language. I am convinced that this will be a strong experience for them as language learners which will free them to attempt things that they would not have otherwise dared to - just as actors are freed within the context of a theater piece.

EGO EXPRESSION

"First, you must learn who you are. You must find your own sense of identity."

-Uta Hagen-
(Hagen 1973)

"Every creature of fantasy and art, in order to exist, must have his drama, that is, a drama in which he is a character. This drama in the character's raison d'etre, his vital function, necessary for his existence."

-Luigi Pirandello-
(Pirandello 1952)

When I speak here of ego expression, I am using the word ego in a rather classical sense, that is, as a description of that part of our psyche which determines the way that we see and feel about ourselves. It is the non-physical entity which we present as ourselves and with which we go forth into the world.

One of the biggest drawbacks for students of a foreign language is the feeling of being unsure of themselves in the new language. This is quite natural but it is widely accepted as having a negative effect on the learning process. This uncertainty is related to the fact that our feelings about ourselves as people are tied to our ability to express ourselves. In a language that is not our native language, especially a language that we are just learning, our ability to express ourselves is naturally limited, which makes us feel less confident in the new language. Knowing that we are not able to fully express ourselves creates an additional barrier to the growth of expression. Herein lies the crux of the role that our fragile language ego plays in the language learning process.

Drama and drama activities work very well to help to overcome this problem/reality. When students have created their own characters, they are already expressing another part of their personality; perhaps a part of their personality that is not normally recognized. Therefore, although it is

"another character" who is speaking, the student still feels a strong attachment to that character. They can still feel a sense of success when the character expresses him/herself well, is humorous or performs a dramatic activity effectively. This is the special, unusual strength of drama as a language teaching tool. It allows students to feel simultaneously both distanced from and connected to themselves as a learner and speaker of the new language.

An additional benefit is that of learning to perform socially without having to risk the humiliation that is so possible in social settings within a new culture. In a theatre piece or in individual role plays, students can practice the skills that they will need to function in this society. Cultural errors may be performed in a realistic way and be corrected by other members of the class or by the instructor. This is a non-threatening way to learn to behave in a culturally appropriate way.

AFFECTIVE FILTER

Following in the same train of thought, I feel compelled to make a statement about the role of the affective filter in this process. The affective filter, as I define it, is that part of your personality/ego which rises as a situation becomes more stressful, causing you to be unable to act

as you would otherwise be capable. As the affective filter is closely connected to the ego, it is the filter which is lowered when drama becomes involved allowing the ego to fully express itself. A student who is expressing him/herself through another character as in a drama activity has their ego involved in the process in a different way. They often feel less pressure to perform correctly (whatever that means for them) because they are speaking through a created character. When students feel that they are less at risk of appearing foolish they are far more willing to take risks with the language, to make mistakes without shame and to speak more emotionally. In this way the affective filter is lowered, allowing students to reach their true potential as language learners.

THE VALUE OF PLAY

"Man plays only when he is man in the full sense of the word and he is totally man only when he plays."

-Schiller-

As children, we learn a great deal through play. We experiment with our environment, with ourselves and with our language. The experimentation is accompanied by a certain liberty to try anything at all. Notice the way that children play at being the teacher, the mom, the expert or the doctor. They are not only playing with a role, but they are also playing with the language

that accompanies it. In addition, children are experimenting with the boundaries of roles; testing and pushing the limits, overlapping and spontaneously changing roles. They are freely playing with and having fun with the concept of roles not being restrained by preconceptions and self- or societally-imposed limits on these roles. At this point, the attitude is that life is fun and filled with possibilities.

Once we are no longer considered to be children, society dictates that this must change. With respect to language learing and manipulation, we must now take it all very seriously. This means memorizing pages of verb conjugations, and practicing the language using a very stilted, formal type of speech. We all remember the practice phrases:

Q. "What is it?"
A. "It's a shoe!"

How often in life do we really speak in this fashion? Using drama for the purpose of learning language, we have an opportunity to play, as we did when we were children. We can approach language learning through our right brain (considered to be the creative processes portion of our brain) rather than through the traditional left-brained methods. We can take on a persona of the big, bad wolf, a punk rocker, a superhero or any of the myriad other possibilities. We can pretend to have any sort of physical or personality traits that we choose. We are given free license to play! Within this play,

the language becomes a natural accompaniment to the roles that we choose to take on and substantial progess within the language is inevitable as it was when we were children first learning our own language.

PROCESS AND PURPOSE

> "I believe that one key to the sucess of Via's approach is the fact that it is really double-barreled: The play provides one kind of exposure to the natural communicative use of language while the use of English in the preparation of the play provides a second kind. In order to talk you have to talk about something. For Via, the play has the double function of being both an end in itself and a topic for discussion and analysis which is deeply involving to the participants."
>
> -Mark Lester, in the Forward to Via- (Via 1976)

The drama project is a special kind of project because it fulfills the students' individual and collective needs for a meaningful process. As Richard Via stated,

"Drama is a purposeful activity because it gives the students something to do that has a beginning and middle, and an end, even if the end is a performance before their own classmates." (Via 1976)

It is true that often times in the language learning process, one does not gain a sense of ever reaching a goal. Rather, there seems to be a series of plateaus to achieve and once you're there, you can see all too clearly the next plateau in the series. This does not lend itself to the kind of satisfaction that is gained from having completed something concrete. A

drama project provides the opportunity to feel this kind of completion while still providing a process that is valuable in and of itself.

CULTURAL EXPRESSION AND ADAPTATION

Much has been written on the difficulties and challenges of adapting to a new culture. Cultural factors cannot be separated from the language and in fact run much deeper than the language itself. However, they are much harder to identify and thus very difficult to learn. Often a newcomer to a culture must observe carefully and make a lot of mistakes and misinterpretations before they feel that they've adapted to the new culture. Drama can help in this process. When a student takes on the persona of, for example, a successful young American male named Mark, s/he practices being that character. Through the instructor and other students' input into how the character should be acting and what the character should be saying - the student crafts a character who could be considered to be "American-like". Continued practice of this character provides a realistic experience of being a member of the American culture. As Kurt Vonnegut Jr. wrote in Mother Night, "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be" (Vonnegut 1961, 1966). Although this is not necessarily something to warn students about, it is a powerful truth. As

students pretend to be a character, they incorporate that character into their already existing array of personas and become to a certain extent that new character. In this way an adolescent student from Taiwan can have the experience of being both a punk rocker and a successful American business person and can use these experiences to better understand and integrate into the American culture at large.

CLASS/GROUP DYNAMICS

"It (drama) is motivating because every participating student has a specific responsibility in making a group activity a success."

-Richard Via-
(Via 1976)

Through work on drama projects, the class becomes a cohesive group which is working towards a communal goal. Students become invested in the outcome of the project and this provides tremendous motivation. There is a sense of participation in a team effort which makes the class into a very supportive self-motivating group. This type of dynamics happens in non-drama classes, but I think that it is rather difficult to establish. My experience with using drama in an EFL class has shown that the class becomes united very quickly both because they are taking risks with each other and with the language but also because they are working together towards a collective goal into which they are all invested.

CONCLUSION

All of the above points combine to make a strong, cohesive, pedagogically sound argument for using drama in the teaching of EFL. Drama combines the important elements of linguistic accuracy, cultural appropriateness, emotional involvement, active, physical participation, the language class as a community and it is exciting and enjoyable for the students.

During the intensive four week course in English as a foreign language at Proctor Academy's Summer School of English I had the opportunity to teach a class relying almost entirely on drama. My overall goal for this course was to create an atmosphere where students could explore the English language and American culture through a progression of drama activities and games. My objectives included the following:

1. Students would develop an awareness of and be able to speak about in English their environs initially, and then themselves and each other.

2. Students would come together as a group, thus allowing for ever increasing individual and group risk taking.

3. Students would become increasingly responsible for creative output, for providing the language used in the course and for determining the process for working with this language.

4. Students would work with smaller, manageable drama-oriented tasks first, working their way up to the final, full blown production. (I felt that students needed to be nurtured through this process in order to be

ready both linguistically and emotionally for the task of the final production.)

My class at Proctor consisted of 7 intermediate students of English between the ages of 14 and 18. They included students from Spain, Taiwan and The Congo; 6 boys and 1 girl.

Following is a progression of drama activities which I successfully used for this class. In most cases, the activities are each written in a three part manner, the first part being my objectives for the activity, the second a description of the proposed task and how I conducted the activity and the third part a process and outcome analysis describing what happened in my experience with this class. Many of these exercises are either taken directly from or are an adaptation of exercises taken from the following sources: English in Three Acts, Richard Via; Drama, Charlyn Wessels; Drama Techniques in Language Learning, Alan Maley and Alan Duff; Language Teaching Techniques, Raymond C. Clark; Index Card Games for ESL, edited by Raymond C. Clark, Experiential Language Learning Techniques, edited by Michael Jerald and Raymond C. Clark, Improvisation for the Theatre, Viola Spolin; Playing, an Introduction to Acting, Paul Kuritz; and Building a Character, Constantin Stanislavski. Where no reference is cited, the

activities were conceived of and developed by me. In most other cases, I have adapted the exercise from its original description.

I began the course with activities that I felt would be stress free and where the students could feel a sense of control over and success with the language. Then, as their confidence grew and trust was developed between the students and myself, I introduced increasingly more complex activities which drew on the students' creative and drama skills. The final product of this progression was a complete dramatic piece which the students conceived of, wrote, directed and acted in themselves. In all cases, the activities were participatory in nature with students having both initiative and control in the direction that the class was going. Following here is a description of the activities used. It should be noted that the progression of any given drama activity was dynamic and improvisational in nature thereby making it difficult at times to describe exactly what transpired in class. In these cases, I have tried to capture the essence of the class in my description.

DRAMA ACTIVITIES FOR EFL: A PROGRESSION

1. OBSERVATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT
   (Maley and Duff 1978, p. 87; Spolin 1963, p. 55)

OBJECTIVE:

Students will become involved with their surroundings, will practice describing language and the question-and-answer language structure of American English.

TASK :

Students were asked to spend 15 minutes "memorizing" the classroom. They were not told what the purpose of this exercise was, simply that they were to be very observant and learn as much as possible about their immediate environment in the time allotted. They were encouraged to use all of their senses - not just their sight - in this discovery process. The exercise was conducted based on my belief that this involvement with their immediate environment was the first step in forging a connection between them and their new environment - the EFL/Drama classroom.

PROCESS/OUTCOME:

After the students had researched the classroom environment, I quizzed them on a variety of details of the classroom while they kept their eyes closed. This included such questions as, "How many windows are there in this room?", and "What is the topic of the painting on the wall nearest the

door?". The relative readiness of my group of students for the entire process upon which they were about to embark was demonstrated by the accuracy of their answers. They had really been quite observant and sometimes knew things which I would not have expected they to know (e.g. "How many tiles are there in the ceiling?" - "168!")

2. FACE PLAY
(Via 1976, p. 14; Spolin 1963, p. 123)

OBJECTIVE:

Students will loosen up and become more relaxed and will realize that the classroom experience allows for all kinds of expression. Students will also see that I, the instructor, am not afraid to play and will feel freer themselves to play and experiment in the class.

TASK:

This activity was designated in my mind as a loosening up activity for uptight and potentially rigid adolescents. The idea is simply to make silly, caricature-like faces while making non-language sounds. I provided a model by being very playful in the making of faces and continued to spontaneously

make faces during the course of that class period. Adjacent activities were deep-breathing exercises, stretching and "singing" up and down the scale in an uncontrolled fashion.

PROCESS/OUTCOME:

What I found was that these students were rather reluctant to play. In fact, I couldn't really blame them. They didn't know each other, me or the United States. I felt that they had a definite resistance at this point to letting go. Certainly, this was attached to the idea that putting oneself in the position of acting in a way that is different from what you are accostomed to is a challenge to your ego. In the case of these adolescents, risking appearing foolish was a risk that they were just not willing to make, at that point.

This told me a great deal about the types of challenges that would be presented to me as a teacher and to the students as individuals. It also helped to make me more sensitive to the importance of constantly assessing where the students were in terms of their willingness to take risks or push themselves further. Although the activity wasn't a success per se, I gained an important perspective which helped me throughout the rest of the course.

3. INTERVIEW

OBJECTIVE:

Students will gain some information about the other students in the class and will demonstrate that they are able to effectively present this information to the whole class. Students will experience being the center of attention and will begin to explore the performance role.

TASK:

The basic premise of this exercise is to act in the role of interviewer. This is a variation on a very common language classroom activity. In the classic version of the interview, students create together a list of questions which they will pose to another student in the class. They then conduct the actual interviews, have a short period of time to synthesize what they have learned through the interview and then they are asked to present the person that they have interviewed to the rest of the class.

My version of the interview activity differed slightly from this. It began by brainstorming a list of questions to ask, as in the original interview. These questions usually tended to be of the classic variety, i.e:

-"Where are you from?"
-"How old are you?"
-"What is your favorite food?" .

The interviews were then conducted and reported on. After discussing in a group some of the students' answers to these questions, the group was then asked to generate another list of questions. This time the goal was to discover something about their interviewee that they would be highly unlikely to share in normal conversation. The students were asked to be sensitive to the wishes of the interviewee to not respond to certain questions. Following the interviews, results of the interviews were again presented and the whole group discussed the responses and their reactions to the activity.

PROCESS/OUTCOME:

The topics that were generated in the second brainstorming session were especially varied and intriguing in nature. They included such things as:

-"If you could be a vegetable, which one would you be and why?"
-"When you see the color purple, how does it make you feel?",
-"If you had to give up one, showers or baths, which would you give up and why?"

Inasmuch as the questions were interesting and revealing of the students, so the responses were as well.

I felt, in particular, that this exericise was the first real breakthrough in establishing an environment of trust and mutual sharing which carried through our entire time together. As the students interviewed each other using these slightly more intimate questions, the humor and sharing that occurred served to bond the students more closely together and to me (I was also interviewed and provided honest and, therefore, revealing answers to the questions).

4. RESEARCH THE ENVIRONMENT IN A DIFFERENT WAY
(Spolin 1970, p. 49-53)

OBJECTIVE:

Students will gain an increased awareness of the different ways of knowing" one's environment. They will also improve their descriptive styles and descriptive vocabulary.

TASK:

This exercise began with a discussion about what is involved when one attempts to really know one's surroundings. The discussion began with the most obvious kinds of things, buildings, people who appear in the environment, descriptions of nature, etc. I encouraged the students to take the next step and to think of other things, perhaps less immediately salient

things, that they were aware of, if only subconsciously, as they survey their surroundings. Students came up with, through guided questions, a list of other pervasive aspects of the environment to which they attended. These included such things as smells, general perceptions of colors (beyond actually noticing what the colors were attached to) weather, perceived mood of the environment, activities that people were engaged in and sounds.

Students were sent out into the immediate neighborhood area and were instructed to conduct their environmental research independently. After spending an hour or so carrying our this indepth research, students then reported on what they had seen and experienced.

PROCESS/OUTCOME:

I had the students perform this activity with the specific goal in mind of their becomng more firmly in touch with all the factors that make up any given experience. This type of awareness, I felt, would transfer from the simple experience of taking a walk and trying to really experience it to the eventual task of taking on a persona and acting within that persona.

For some students, this experience was freeing and exciting. In these cases, students returned with fascinating details on interactions they'd witnessed between people or an observation on how the day's weather had

made the village of Andover feel to them. In other cases, I received a perfunctory report on the status of the flowers and the trees. In these cases, I saw the perfunctory nature of the students' exploration as indicating an unwillingness or an inability to delve below the surface of the day-to-day either based on their never having done this or because of their feelings about their English ability. I used this insight to help me in finding ways to encourage and allow these students to make that leap of faith that would allow them to play and experiment with the environment and language that they were trying to learn.

5. MYSTERY PERSON: "WHO AM I?"
(Wessels 1987, p. 34)

OBJECTIVE:

Students will practice the structures of questions and answers and will gain a sense of the process involved in their taking on a different persona.

TASK:

In this exercise the students were required to use interrogative vocabulary while trying to guess the identity which had been assigned to them. Prior the start of class, I wrote on slips of paper (post-it-notes) the

names of American personalities which I thought were likely to be known by all of the students. Then, an indentity was placed on the back of each student. The students' task was to divide themselves into groups of two or three and ask questions to the other students about the character which they had been assigned. The goal for the students was to determine the identity of their own character.

PROCESS/OUTCOME:

It was my feeling that through this activity the students would not only have the opportunity to practice typical question and answer vocabulary, but also that they would begin to toy with the notion of taking on other personas in the EFL classroom setting. By asking such questions as:

-"Am I black?"
-"Am I a woman?"
-"Am I alive or dead?"

the students explored the possibility of becoming someone other than they really were. This is a basic premise behind drama and theatre - that we are capable of exposing more facets of our personality than we normally exhibit, such as that of being a different race or sex.

What I noted about this activity was the conversation which ensued after the characters had all been guessed. Many of the students chose to be

"in character" for a period of time answering and asking questions as though they were their character. This was particularly interesting in the cases of the students who were political figures such as Ronald and Nancy Reagan, Michael Dukakis and George Bush.

6. A CHARACTER EMERGES
(Clark 1984, p. 47; Spolin 1963, p. 254-256) Adapted by Patrick Moran, School for International Training, 1988.

OBJECTIVE:

Students will design a character of their choice and begin to explore the various facets of this character.

TASK:

This activity was the official beginning of the development off the students' characters. By way of background information, this activity was designed to be the beginning stage of the process leading to the final drama production. A crucial factor in this process as I see it is that the students create out of their own psyche the character which they will use over a period of time. At the outset, I did not announce that the character is going to carry over beyond the one class so as not to create undue tension about

the nature of the character. My belief is that the creation of a "character" is rather like the creation of a dream during sleep; it tends to reveal a great deal about the individual. By asking students to create the character that they would ultimately play, I felt that they were immediately more invested in the process of playing with that character and it gave me greater insight into who the students were as individuals.

PROCESS/OUTCOME:

The process of the emerging character began with a discussion of descriptive vocabulary. At this point, we focused our discussion on the description of physical characteristics such as hair style and color, height, build, shape of the face, skin and eye color and so forth. Students generated as much vocabulary as they could within each topic area and I recorded all of their suggestions on the black board. Many words came up which were known by only one or two students. I then provided other previously unmentioned vocabulary to add to that which had been generated by the students. Students were recommended to take notes for later use.

The students were then asked to draw a picture of a character of their choice. They were told that it could be any character at all, but that it had to be their own creation (they could not choose an existing figure in

literature, politics, cinema etc.) They were asked to also provide a written description of this person using words from each of the descriptive vocabulary areas which had already been identified.

After the pictures and descriptions were finished, students presented their characters to each other; first in groups of two or three and then to the whole group. Students were encouraged to comment freely on the characters that their classmates had created. In this way, an open dialogue was established with respect to the characters and we all began to treat these created characters as real. I felt that there was an important bonding which took place at this time with respect to these characters. Already, students found that there were certain characters which they preferred to others.

7. THE CHARACTER TAKES ON NEW DIMENSIONS
(Clark 1980, p. 47) Adapted by Patrick Moran, 1988.

OBJECTIVE:

Students will develop the necessary language to describe a person other than purely physical characteristics. Further, students will establish an additional connection with their created characters.

TASK:

This activity began with a discussion of other ways to describe a person, beyond the physical characteristics discussed in the previous activity. Included in this were the qualities of the character's voice and walk, their mood or attitude in general or toward a specific topic, their gestures and occupation. Again, students generated their ideas for each topic area and I added additional vocabulary to the lists which the students created.

Students were then asked to consider the character which they had created in the previous activity and to continue to describe and define them using the new criteria. Students shared these new descriptions, again in small groups of two or three students and then with the whole group.

PROCESS/OUTCOME:

I noticed in this activity a spontaneous willingness on the part of the students to get up and "act out" what they were trying to describe. For example, one student had created a character named Miss Amanda whom he described as big, fat and disgusting. During his oral presentation of the character, he stood up, shoved several pieces of loose clothing under his shirt and moved around the room acting in a way that he considered to be

disgusting. I saw this as a sign that this student, at least, was positively disposed to the idea of acting based upon the character and I hoped that this positive disposition would transfer to the other students as well.

8. FEELINGS
(Wessels 1987, p. 44; Spolin 1963, p. 241)

OBJECTIVE:

Students will effectively act out some common emotions in such a way that the other students may guess which emotion is being represented. Students will also gain an increased confidence in acting in the class.

TASK:

This activity was the first actual acting activity. It was rather a simple one but I felt and continue to feel that acting which is specifically focused on emotions is extremely powerful.

The procedure for this activity began with students dividing into two groups/teams. I chose to designate the team members to ensure that students whose native languages were different were together on a team. Prior to class I wrote a variety of common - and not so common - emotion descriptors on index cards. Emotions included were jealousy, fear, grief,

love, hate, anxiety, shame, nervousness, shyness, defensiveness, worry, greed, happiness, envy, surprise and peacefulness. Each team received 4 cards. The students were instructed to choose one card to begin with and to plan a charade to perform collectively to attempt to illustrate this word. The other team was to guess what emotion was being played. In some cases students on a team took on different roles thus playing out a drama to illustrate their emotion and in other cases they chose to all perform the same illustrative activity simultaneously.

PROCESS/OUTCOME:

As the activity progressed, the drama became more and more pronounced. I was most pleased with the process as it took place. I also found that the students enjoyed this activity and after we had gone through all of the cards that I had prepared, they asked me to provide them with other emotions to act out. At that point, I chose some more difficult words such as blame, paranoia, etc. The students reacted to the additional challenge by relying even more on their dramatic sense to achieve their goal of portraying an emotion.

The trust between the students and between the students and the

teacher which developed during this activity subsequently carried through to all of the other drama activities that we did.

9. BE THE EXPERT - OR - A DRAMATIC PRESENTATION
(Jerald and Clark, editors, 1983, p. 55)

OBJECTIVE:

Students will make a presentation to the class on something that they know a great deal about. They will feel a sense of accomplishment and success to have effectively presented something that they are knowledgeable about.

TASK:

This activity is, again, an adaptation from the classic, formal presentation model. The adaptation is one which changes the focus from pure presentation to dramatic presentation. The goal is to combine the skills of conceiving of and developing an idea into a presentation with a dramatic element.

The students were asked to create a list of things that they do well and/or that they enjoy doing. I began this process by showing them a list which I created showing a wide variety of activities and skills which I feel

that I do well, e.g. run, speak French, cook vegetarian food, write entertaining letters, etc. After the students had written their own lists, they shared their lists with the rest of the class. The next step in the process was to choose one of the skills/talents that they felt particularly attached to. The students were asked to create a presentation of 15-25 minutes on the identified skill or talent that would be presented to the class and videotaped. I told the students that they were to give their presentation pretending to be the best person in the country/world at whatever thing they had chosen. I made it clear that these presentations were meant to be fun and silly as well as informative; that they were to "toot their horns" as much as they wished to. I also suggested that the presentations did not have to be entirely factual and that fictitous additions were allowable as well as desireable. The students were given three days to prepare their dramatic presentations. Included in their presentation preparation was a group brainstorming session where students helped each other to decide what information they wished to include in their presentations and an opportunity to discuss different presentation styles.

PROCESS/OUTCOME:

The outcome of these presentations was quite interesting for all

involved. Students did such things as give presentations on ancient Greek architecture, water skiing, table tennis and how to make gazpacho. In each case, a certain amount of the presentation was fabricated information; things that they either believed to be true without proof or things that were completely creations from their imaginations. I felt that the students' willingness to play with information and the formal presentation style was a desireable outcome of this activity. As students demonstrated that they were able to create a truth - to do other than to spew out what they had already heard - they also demonstrated that they were drawing closer to integrating the language into their person.

10. CHOOSE ROLES AND GO

OBJECTIVE:

Students will use drama and appropriate language to tell stories that they have written.

Prior to this activity, the students had written stories collectively using a process writing model. The students were not aware during the writing process that their story would eventually be acted out. After the stories had been read, discussed and edited, the students voted on one of the

stories with which they were going to continue to work. This activity took over at that point.

TASK/PROCESS/OUTCOME:

The students decided amongst themselves who was going to play each of the various roles in the story. As there were not enough roles to go around, three of the students were designated as narrators and sound effects people. The story was written in a narrative form and so the narrators were actually the most verbal members of the group. The students worked together to determine appropriate actions and a dialogue to fit their story. None of the stage directions or dialogue were written. This was a conscious decision on my part with the intention that the "play" would be different each time that they performed it. This in fact was the case. Each time that they rehearsed, the story became richer and more detailed. The "final product" was quite a different story from the original story that they had written. This play was never performed for anyone other than ourselves, thus making the point to me that an audience is not necessary for a meaningful drama activity.

11. THE CHARACTERS ARE MORE FINELY TUNED

OBJECTIVE:

Students will have the opportunity and encouragement to take new risks in describing and playing their characters. They will effectively tell a story through their characters' eyes.

TASK:

Again using the characters which they had created, the students revised their character, adding character traits or other background information as they desired. This activity was simply an opportunity to be more creative and daring with their characters, especially for those students who had not already done so. Then, I asked them to write from their characters' points of view about the most frightening experience that they had ever had. I could have asked them to describe a funny thing that had happened or the first time that the character fell in love, etc. Anything that would have encouraged the students to have their characters respond out of an emotion would have been appropriate.

PROCESS/OUTCOME:

The types of experiences that my students at Proctor came up with were quite diverse in nature and many were humorous. My belief is that introducing emotion (eg fear, surprise, happiness) into the character development process makes the students relate more closely with their and other characters. In addition, it creates a context where they can begin to use the language in an emotional style.

12. CHARACTERS MEET EACH OTHER

OBJECTIVE:

Students will effectively play out through their character pre-designed scenarios. Students will continue to grow in their ability and willingness to be creative with their characters.

TASK:

Prior to class, I wrote out a series of scenario descriptions using pairs of characters that had been created by the class. Examples of the interactions used in my class are: "Miss Amanda is in love with Super Stupid and is trying to convince him that he should love her also", "Mr. Punk,

who is a drug addict, is trying to persuade Mark to start taking drugs. Mark does not agree", etc. I felt that in this activity the roles needed to be quite clearly defined and delegated so that the students could concentrate not on WHAT they were going to do but rather HOW. It should also be noted I wrote the scenarios based entirely on characteristics and ideas that had already been generated by the students themselves.

The students involved in each interaction/scenario were given 15 minutes together to prepare their presentation. Again, HOW the interaction was presented was entirely up to the students and they had the option of writing down their dialogue or performing in an ad lib style. The students then presented to the whole class and the presentations were videotaped for later viewing and critique.

PROCESS/OUTCOME:

During the presentation of the situations, the observers' task was to watch and enjoy. After each presentation, the observers and participants were encouraged to provide constructive feedback and commentary on what had transpired, including comments on what they liked and didn't like about the presentation and what was clear and unclear. In some cases the

students wished to perform their piece again following the feedback session and whenever time permitted, this is what they did.

13. DEVELOPMENT OF ALTER-EGOS

OBJECTIVE:

Students will explore and express the concept of opposites by developing the alter-ego of their character. They will also feel that they have expressed another part of themselves thus making their feelings of being able to communicate more complete.

Some of the students had expressed that they were growing tired of their original characters. In most cases, their original characters were quite extreme in nature - punk rockers, drug addicts, pimps or very clean cut professional men and women. I feel that there is a great power in exploring opposites. I base this on a sense that by exploring our opposites, we explore the naturally positive and negative aspects of our nature. Thus, based on their expressed needs and my own sense of things, this activity was developed.

TASK/PROCESS/OUTCOME:

Rather than asking the students to expand their original characters further, I asked them to develop the alter-ego of their characters. I stressed that the new character did not have to be the diametric opposite to the original character but that it had to be significantly different and related to the original character. Given the fact that the students now understood that they were going to be playing with these characters, they developed new characters with interesting "playable" traits.

After they had been given a period of time to create the characters, I had them exchange their descriptions with another student and offer suggestions to each other on how they might further develop this new character. Then, the students presented these new characters to the whole group also describing how they were different from the original character.

14. ALTER-EGOS MEET

OBJECTIVE:

Students will develop a mini-drama using their new characters and will understand more fully the natures of these characters.

TASK:

The names of the new characters were put into a hat. Students drew names and pairs were established. The students were told to develop a short skit, in character, based on one of three situations. An example situation was:

"You both want to date the same person and you are friends. How do you resolve this dilemma?"

The students worked together for approximately 30 minutes to develop this mini-drama and were told to write down only notes for performance, not a fully written dialogue. The reason for this is to encourage the use of real, dialogue-like language in these mini-dramas rather than the often stiff language that is used in second language writing.

PROCESS/OUTCOME:

The students performed these skits for each other and were videotaped. Again, the observers and participants offered feedback on the efficacy of the skits:

-Did the participants get a "feel" for the dilemma at hand?
-Did the observers get the same feeling as the participants?

-What was the same?
-What was different?

The videotape was watched later and used mostly as a vehicle for reinforcing the students' successes in having portrayed their dramas in an effective manner.

15. A VARIATION OF ALTER-EGOS EMERGE

TASK:

In this variation, the development of the alter ego progressed as above. When it was time to present the new character, the activity changed slightly. In this case, students presented their alter ego as they had presented their original characters. The observing students brainstormed 4 or 5 questions to ask the new character to get to know that character better. The questions were tailored to the personality of the character. In turn the students answered the questions in character providing them with another opportunity to take on the new persona and use the language "as if" they were that character.

16. WRITE A DIALOGUE

OBJECTIVE:

Students will act out with a partner or partners dialogues that they have written. Students will take additional control over the characters that they have written and feel increasingly invested in the character development experience.

TASK:

Students were asked to use their original character and/or their alter ego and any other character or characters which had been presented by the class to write a short dialogue of approximately 2 pages. I left the choice of a topic for the dialogue up to the individual students. The following day, students presented their dialogues by reading them aloud to the rest of the class and using other class members to participate in the reading. The result was a semi-formal acting experience in that for the first time a written text was provided.

PROCESS/OUTCOME:

Student dialogues were written about a variety of dramatic topics. For

example, one dialogue was between two of the characters who had had a minor car accident and were animately discussing and arguing about whose fault it was. I found it fascinating, and I believe that the students would agree, to see how the students interpreted each other's characters. Often times, the students had projected their own characters' traits onto the characters of other students. This provided the fodder for some lively discussion and disagreement regarding the topic of the dialogues and the treatment of the characters. In some cases the students did not like the way that their character had been portrayed and during the discussion they were called upon to challenge other students' portrayals and defend their opinions. The experience was additionally rich because all of the material used in this activity had been generated by the students. I also noted that the students had become quite attached to their characters and their characters' relationships with other characters in the class. This is true, I believe, because the students had begun to feel that their characters were real for them and their classmates. With the shift from pure fantasy to reality, the students entered a new stage of trust for each other and for the process at hand. I believe that their attachment to their characters was very instrumental in the amount and depth of risks that the students were

willing to take with the language and culture with which they were experimenting through these activities.

17. A KIND OF CHARADES - "WHAT ARE WE DOING?"
(Wessels 1987, p. 41; Spolin 1963, p. 218)

OBJECTIVE:

Students will successfully act out action scenes in a way that other students are able to guess what they are representing in their actions.

TASK:

Students were divided into groups of 2 or 3 with the criteria for division being that in any group, English will be the only common language. (Fortunately, I had a group of students which readily allowed for this kind of division which ensured that the discussion would remain in the target language.) Prior to class, I wrote a series of action descriptions on index cards. Examples of actions that I used include:

-You are walking a group of very frisky dogs.
-You are watching T.V. and arguing over which show to watch.
-You are trying to sell a work of art that you have created to a skeptical buyer.

The descriptions of the actions were fairly specific. The students were given approximately 20 minutes to design the specific actions that they would act out. Then they acted out their actions in turn, with the observers trying to guess the specifics of the action performed. The goal for the groups was for the observer's statement of what was happening to match the original action statement on the index card. This encouraged students to be specific and accurate in their choice of words.

Following the work with the pre-created action descriptions, the students created their own action scenes to act out. As with the preceding portion of this activity, the goal for the observers was to guess precisely what the action description was.

18. MINI-PLAY: "CONFLICTS AND RESOLUTIONS"

OBJECTIVE:

Given the basic idea of "resolving a conflict" students will write and develop dramas working with this concept.

TASK:

This activity began with the designation of working groups. I tended to do this often with my Proctor group because of the tendency of this class to

form themselves into cliques and because of a desire to keep the groups organized in such a way that English would be their only common language.

I asked the students to write and prepare to perform a 15 - 30 minute skit using any of their previously created characters. I provided them with the very broad guideline that the skit must reflect a conflict that emerges and a resolution of that conflict. For example, two students wrote and performed a skit where one of them had run into the other's car with his car. They had an argument about whose fault it was, how reparation should be made and ended up being friends.

PROCESS/OUTCOME:

In this case, the students had expressed to me that they felt more comfortable with assignments where they had some sort of established guidelines on which to base their presentations. Hence, the pre-established theme mentioned above.

I provided the students with in-class work time for the preparation of these skits. I aided them in the brainstorming process and provided help in determining appropriate language to use given each situation. The students also conferred with other groups in the class, where appropriate, as well as additional resources such as books, people on the campus and so on.

The students were asked to hand in a written version of the dialogue in addition to performing the skit. I told them that I didn't care whether or not the skit followed the dialogue exactly but that I wanted to see a written version. I continued to encourage them to improvise as much as they wished to during actual performances in class.

The end result of this work was very rewarding and exciting. The students as a whole had put a great deal of effort and time into the preparation of their skits. In some cases, the skits ran as long as 45 minutes. Given the fact that this meant 45 minutes of performing in English I did not comment on their having gone overtime. The skits were videotaped and we reviewed the videotape together after the class had had a feedback and critique session.

19. THE FINAL PROJECT IN EIGHT STEPS

OBJECTIVE:

Students will produce collectively a final performance piece in English taking responsibility for all stages of the process.

This project was intended to be, and was the culmination of four weeks of intense work together as a class. I had originally conceived of the final project as being a theatre piece performed for an audience including the other students who were participating in Proctor Academy's Summer School of English. Given the fact that we had made great use of the videocamera and that the students expressed an interest in making a final "movie", I decided to alter my original plan and change the final theatre piece into a final movie. I felt that this would not considerably alter the purpose of the final piece which was that the students would conceive of, write, direct and perform a piece together.

STEP 1:

The preparation for the final project began with my introduction of the proposed process. I stated that I would always be available to help, to provide my opinions and insights when desired and to intervene if any serious problems arose but that by and large the process and the piece were going to be theirs. I suggested a format where the students would take turns being leader and facilitator of the discussion to determine the details of the movie. A student volunteered to be the first facilitator and at that

point, I bowed out of the process and took a seat in the rear of the class to observe and to take notes.

STEP 2:

The students collectively determined the basic story line/plot and the characters. This discussion was very circular in nature with a part of the plot being determined and then a backtracking to finetune or change the characters involved and back to the plot to continue or to alter everything previously determined. I was impressed with the level of sophistication of the students at this point and their willingness to hear all opinions on a particular point before making a final determination. In most cases, whichever student was facilitating would bring a point of contention to closure by indicating that it was time to move on and that a decision must be made to facilitate the process. Once or twice, I intervened when a decision seemed particularly difficult to arrive at and helped to bring the group to consensus. The end result of this discussion was a list of characters, their fundamental relationships to the plot and an outline of the story plot written in a scene by scene fashion.

STEP 3:

The basic story plot was divided into three sections and the students determined a group of two or three students to write a dialogue for each of the plot sections. The concept behind this process was that the groups would each flesh out their sections of the total play based upon their knowledge of the plot line and the characterizations and that when the three groups came back together to compare, differences or discrepancies would then be worked out. The groups worked together for an afternoon and an evening to write the dialogue sections.

STEP 4:

The whole group came back together to review, discuss and edit the dialogues which had been written. Again, a student acted as facilitator and I remained in my role as observer and troubleshooter. There were, in fact, some serious discrepancies and difficulties in melding the dialogues together but the outcome was a clearer, more comprehensible story line and a tighter, more cohesive group.

STEP 5:

As soon as a basic dialogue and plot had been established, the students

wrote an exact sequence of "shots" to be filmed and elected a director. They determined that they would decide the details of each scene collectively, but that when a consensus could not be achieved, that the director would have the final word. They then determined costumes, props and locations for the shots.

An interesting note in this step of the sequence was that the students collectively made a commitment at this point to give up how ever much time it would take to complete the filming process. In fact it took nearly 3 days of 8 - 10 hours to complete the final project. This constituted most of their free time. I was impressed with the fact that it was their decision to require a collective commitment to the project and to the level of investment and commitment which they then exhibited.

STEP 6:

The actual filming of the piece then began. Each shot was designed, set up and rehearsed. When the students felt confident that it was ready, the scene was videotaped. Although dialogues had been written, it was agreed that they were to be used as the skeleton for each schene and that students were free to improvise provided it fit into the basic concept of the piece. The biggest challenge of this step was to keep the piece moving forward.

Because of the level of investment on the part of the students there was a tendency to be overly perfectionistic and detail-oriented. I attempted to curb this by encouraging the students to keep moving forward and not to get trapped by piciune details. For the most part, I was able to help keep their focus moving forward.

STEP 7:

When the filming was finished, the students watched the film together several times enjoying the fruits of their labor, laughing together, critiquing and appreciating. We then added music to certain parts of the film, created handbills and determined a time when we would show our creation to an audience.

STEP 8 - THE VIEWING:

Perhaps one of the highest moments of our time together, the viewing was an opportunity for the students to show what they had done and to see the reactions of their fellow students. The feedback was very positive from all sides. Both the other students and staff were impressed and entertained by the outcome of our project.

SUMMARY

Based upon my experience at Proctor and subsequent experience with other classes, I am convinced as to the efficacy of drama techniques in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

As can be seen by the process and outcomes that I've detailed above, drama activities in the language classroom allow for very desireable outcomes. My class indeed did gel together and become a cohesive, invested group working together towards a common goal. They were able to begin to express themselves freely and creatively through their created characters. I noticed that this transferred to their use of English and their behavior outside of the language classroom. This class also moved very naturally from the simpler, less threatening drama tasks to the very involved and complex process of creating a full theater piece. They felt and acted as though they were ready for this project! I felt that my objectives for the course were met and more. Here I would like to briefly summarize my objectives and their outcomes during this course:

Objective 1:

Students would develop an awareness of and be able to speak about their environs, themselves and each other in English.

Outcome:

The students' awareness of their surroundings and each other and their ability to speak about these things showed significant improvement.

Objective 2:

Students would come together as a group, thus allowing for ever increasing individual and group risk taking.

Outcome:

As I've previously stated, this group of students truly did come together, building themselves into a group, creating a class atmosphere where they could take increasingly greater risks, both with the English language and themselves in an intercultural sense.

Objective 3:

Students woul become increasingly responsible for creative output, for providing the language used in the course and for determining the process to work with the language.

Outcome:

Indeed, students became responsible for creating a vast majority of the

material that we worked with and they learned to manage their process of working with the language to an extent that I was quite satisfied with.

Objective 4:

Students would work with smaller, manageable, drama-oriented tasks working their way up to the final, complete production.

Outcome:

Again, this is exactly what ended up happening. Students began by working with small, discreet dramatic situations and worked their way through to a full dramatic piece.

I couldn't be more pleased about the outcomes of my month at Proctor Academy and the admirable progress, both linguistically and sociolinguistically, of my students there.

It is true that these activities require a great amount of concentration and commitment on the part of both the students and the instructor and I believe that this is the reason why these techniques work so well. When the entire group is committed to and invested in the process, success cannot be far away.

With all of my glowing support of drama in the EFL classroom I must offer a few warnings or suggestions to the instructor who is considering

incorporating drama into their curriculum. First of all, my sense is that these techniques work the best in smaller classes. This is not to say that drama is out of the question for larger groups, but I think that the techniques must be altered somewhat. Perhaps a larger group would first need to be divided down into working groups of 5-10 students. In any event, if the class size is large, special consideration would need to be given to developing trust and support within that large group.

A second consideration of importance is the presence of psychological factors emerging out of the drama process. While I do not believe that the EFL teacher needs to be or should be a therapist in any way, it is important to keep in mind that drama is closely attached to memory and emotion. Sometimes the acting process is rather like opening Pandora's Box. . .who knows what may emerge. If the instructor bears this in mind, they can be sensitive to the experiences of the students and can perhaps avoid particularly sensitive topics or issues once they are known.

Keeping these things in mind, an instructor who wishes to bring drama into his/her language classroom needs to be well-prepared, to know where they wish to proceed through drama and then to approach the process with energy and creativity. Drama is a dynamic process that is a challenge to

both students and instructors and the outcomes are well worth the efforts for all involved.

Personally, I continue to feel gratified and interested in the outcomes of my experience in teaching English through drama at Proctor. What I learned in particular is that the language through drama process is a very rich one. I feel that with the experience I now have, I will be much more prepared to make use of the variety and richness that drama can offer to the language classroom and that I will be increasingly capable to use students as the springboard for all activities, allowing them to determine and control much more of what happens in the class. What remains particularly salient for me is that drama mimics life in a way that no other classroom activity could do and that this is what I will focus on as I continue to experiment with drama as a language teaching tool.

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